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Statement submitted by Pax Romana, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

Introduction

The global economic and financial crisis continues to make an impact on the lives of people around the world. It has been a major setback to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the World Programme of Action for Youth. The crisis has caused more people than ever to be living in poverty. The crisis has also proven that youth are a very vulnerable group. Now, as the global population reaches 7 billion, the world is in need of a strong coordination of efforts, the empowerment of civil society organizations and true global solidarity. With special regard to youth and the eradication of poverty, Pax Romana finds that today's pressing issues are education, employment and political participation.

Education

The crisis has created a surge in those seeking admission to institutions of higher learning, in hopes of finding better employment opportunities. As Governments grapple with budgetary issues, funding for education is being reduced even though there is an increase in demand. For those who live in countries where higher education is either partially or entirely subsidized by the State, Governments and institutions will be faced with several choices: limit admission, allow for an increase in admission while reducing student subsidies, or provide a lower quality education to the same number of students.

Reducing subsidies to students in higher education is a risky move because it directly affects the future and development of a country. A reduction of subsidies and a growth in enrolment will likely place any financial burdens faced by universities on individual students. This situation gives the wealthier students disproportionate access to education. Students who are economically challenged are automatically disadvantaged. The greatest weapon for defeating poverty in a developing State is an education system that is open to all people, regardless of wealth, gender, religion or ethnicity. If poverty eradication is to be taken seriously by the Member States, Governments must understand the value of an education that is accessible to all members of society.

Youth unemployment

According to the International Labour Organization publication *Global Employment Trends for Youth: 2011 Update*, youth unemployment is a major contributing factor to the protest movements that have erupted around the world, especially in the Middle East and North Africa. Moreover, this trend towards protest has helped to galvanize the "occupy" movements against corporate greed and the preferential treatment that Western Governments have given to banks and other economic players. As a result, something must be done to help young people to become productive members of society, and not just persons on the fringe who feel disconnected.

Youth non-governmental organizations understand well that young people are essential to economic development. For this reason, organizations such as Pax Romana focus on the development of the person as a means to eradicate poverty. Young people who are active in youth associations and community-based and faith-based organizations develop a set of transferable skills which are needed for decent

employment. Projects that focus on the development of the young person help to empower youth with transferable skills.

With projects that engage young people, Pax Romana assists in the formation of broad skill areas such as:

(a) Communication;

(b) Research and planning;

(c) Human relations;

(d) Organization and management;

(e) Leadership.

With these broad skill areas of social development, young people gain necessary tools to procure employment and earn a decent wage. But, as Governments have become more concerned with saving the wealthy at the expense of the rest of society, youth programmes will continue to suffer.

Currently, Governments have divested funds from youth programmes to cater to powerful corporate interests, which played a central role in bringing about the Great Recession. As protest movements around the world continue to gain ground, it is in the best interests of the Member States to engage with young people and work with them to bring about a brighter future.

Youth participation

The political protests that have engulfed many societies around the world can also be blamed on the lack of youth participation in government. Far too often, Governments make decisions without ever addressing the needs of young people or requesting their input on how decisions should be made. As recent history has shown us, young people can play a passionate and often destructive role as engines for change. As a result, it is critical that Governments engage their national youth so that dialogue can begin.

When given the opportunity to play an enhanced role in the machinations of governance and other social sectors, pressing social problems such as youth unemployment and crime can be alleviated. When youth are allowed to blossom into full members of society at an early age, they learn to value their place in their individual communities and work to make improvements in any way they can. By allowing young people to take a more active role in the decision-making processes vital to society, youth can play a much more valuable role at all levels of governance and society.

In order to achieve youth participation, negative stereotypes surrounding youth must be battled. Adults have forgotten the value of youth to society. As the Youth Employment Network wrote in its report *Joining Forces with Young People: A Practical Guide to Collaboration for Youth Employment*, "Rather than being viewed as a problem or risk to be contained or solved, youth should be recogrized as social actors with skills and capacities to bring about constructive solutions to societal issues that directly affect them. Policymakers should not only invite young people into policy discussions but also listen and act upon their advice."

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, said that youth should be given a chance to take an active part in the decision-making of local,

national and global levels. It is especially important that young people are given the opportunity to play a role in politics and policymaking at all levels.

Recommendations

In conclusion, we make the following recommendations:

(a) The focus on education must not fall victim to the economic and financial crisis. Instead of cutting budgets and spending on education, this is the opportune moment to invest even more in education. Focusing on the long-term vision rather than on immediate results will help to eradicate poverty. All efforts should be made to prevent the marginalization of the poor with respect to access and success in higher education;

(b) A small percentage of national defence budgets should be used to fund youth development projects. All over the world, Governments have allowed military spending to grow at the expense of necessary social development. If Member States dedicate even 1 per cent of current military spending and use it to fund youth grass-roots initiatives, greater economic and social development can be achieved. Young people in every country have the capacity to bring positive change to their communities and the world. With a little bit of financial assistance from their Governments, youth everywhere can be given the opportunity to do truly wonderful work;

(c) Countries must take seriously the protests movements that have erupted around the world. Thus, Governments should ensure that young people have a voice in national debates, especially in the development of domestic policies. Participating in this process allows young people to take ownership of their future. The establishment of national youth councils and the assurance of their independent governance from the Government ensures that the voice of even the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups are expressed;

(d) States should mobilize the resources necessary to ensure that youth delegates are able to participate in the proceedings held within the United Nations and its agencies. The participation of youth leaders at the United Nations is critical because it provides hands-on training to future political leaders and allows young people to have a voice in the development of global policy;

(e) States must seek to utilize the technical skills of young people and expand the amount of work available in fields such as clean energy and sustainable development. The knowledge of youth can to help forge advancements in cutting-edge industries that can improve the economy, provide countless jobs and protect the environment from the destructive powers of unfettered human development;

(f) States should encourage social cohesion and use youth as the vehicle to promote stability and peace. This is especially critical in pluralistic societies. The purpose of the International Year of Youth was to promote dialogue and mutual understanding. Youth can be at the forefront of any efforts to alleviate civil strife. Young people already have a great deal of experience in countries throughout the world in working with those who are different from them. As a result, youth have the capacity to bring the many groups that may exist in a single society together for the sake of greater economic and social development.